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**Investigating the Australian lump-sum Baby Bonus and the reach of its
pronatalist messages with young women in Far North Queensland**

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January 2011**

**Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Arts, Education & Social Sciences
James Cook University**

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Declaration on ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee, approval number H2598.

Signature

Date

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Investigating the Australian lump-sum Baby Bonus and the reach of its pronatalist messages with young women in Far North Queensland

Abstract

Pronatalism is a state-level ideology promoting birth increase that governments of developed and some developing nations have adopted in the interests of future economic stability and age balance. In 2004, the former Federal Treasurer of Australia provided a clear and simple pronatalist message for population growth to correct the ageing skew: ‘have one for mum, one for dad, and one for the country’. Social policy matched this message also in a clear and simple way. The creation of a non-discriminatory, generous lump-sum Baby Bonus paid to the birth (or adoptive) mother became a congruent financial endorsement of the tandem message to ‘procreate and cherish’, a coinage that resonated with the older warning, ‘populate or perish’. An increase in birth numbers after 2004 suggests that such messages have spoken to the national psyche, at least in the short term. Sustained population growth, however, is achieved when as many women as possible have the all-important third child. The younger a woman commences childbearing, the more likely it is, by widening her fertility window, that she will go on to have ‘one for the country’.

Messages in the public arena have emphasised the age limitation of the female fertility window. Concerns about the ageing population that translated into pronatalist social policy have fused with the medical discourse of the risk of delaying conception. Such messages based on the probabilities of pregnancy being twice as high for women aged 15-26 as for women aged 35-39 convert to a risk narrative that constructs female fertility as a personal resource ebbing with age. This is not a new message, but one newly emphasised in the pronatalist state, exaggerated by the assisted reproduction industry maximising market share. The theoretical proposition calls on an idiosyncratic combination of rational choice and risk aversion theories to complement the conceptual proposition: the rational choice for women whose life script includes having children may be to avert the risk of age-related infertility by attempting to conceive naturally sooner in the life course than has been the 40-year norm.

Indications about changing norms surrounding the entry age into motherhood may be discernible in a young female population, a conceptual proposition that formed the basis of the research of the thesis. The Amber Light Project, the identity of the mixed methods research created to complement the thesis, was conducted in the Cairns Local Government Area of Far North Queensland between October 2007 and June 2008. Participants were 13-16 year-old young women (n=230), all Australian residents and 95 per cent non-Indigenous, who

completed a questionnaire in a public school setting. Key subjects from the questionnaire formed the basis for 17 semi-structured focus group discussions. The study explored participants' attitudes toward age for first-time motherhood, fertility and the Baby Bonus. One finding was that participants projected their first births occurring between 25 and 29 or, secondarily, between 20 and 24, but not later than 30 or earlier than 20. In other words, the two extremes of teen and delayed motherhood were mostly rejected by this group of young women. If a single year could be nominated for first-time motherhood aspiration for these young women, it would be the year they turn 25. This is three years younger than the 2006 national mean maternal age at first birth. Twenty per cent of questionnaire respondents expressed fears that they may not be able to become pregnant, and over two-thirds of the discussion group participants contributed views about factors that could compromise a woman's fertility. The strong, symbolic, procreative message of the lump-sum Baby Bonus may have reached this age group. Over half knew how much the lump-sum Baby Bonus was, and all focus group participants held strong views about this payment.

Participants' responses add substantial new information about young women forming their fertility futures under the influences of pronatalism and the procreative message of the lump-sum Baby Bonus that no other research has so far explored. Findings are not generalisable to the total population. However, this thesis proposes the possibility that younger motherhood may be evolving in pronatalist Australia away from the delayed motherhood trend of the past 40 years. This study contributes to the literature on motherhood in Australia and international fertility theory, providing a sociological examination of a chapter in Australia's population history: the life of the lump-sum Baby Bonus and its roles.

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List of abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACNFP	Australian Council of Natural Fertility Planning
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIHW	Australian Institute for Health and Welfare
ALP	Amber Light Project
ALSWH	Australian Longitudinal Study of Women's Health
ANC	Allowance for Newborn Children
ANU	Australian National University
ARACY	Australian Research Association for Children and Youth
ARHA	Australian Reproductive Health Alliance
ARMA	Association for Research on Mothering – Australia
ART	assisted reproductive technology
ATP	Australian Temperament Project
AuSSA	Australian Survey of Social Attitudes
BOM	Billings Ovulation Method
CFR	completed fertility rate
DTT	demographic transition theory
EQ	Education Queensland
FaCSIA	Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
FaHCSIA	Department of Housing, Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (formerly FaCSIA)
FAO	Family Assistance Office
FCTR	First Child Tax Refund
FDMP	Fertility Decision Making Project
FHOG	First Home Owner Grant
FHOB	First Home Owners Boost
GDP	gross domestic product
HILDA	Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey
HOD	Head of Department
HPE	Health and Physical Education
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ILO	International Labour Organization
IVF	invitro fertilisation
IWC	International Women's Conference

List of abbreviations cont'd

JCU	James Cook University
LGA	Local Government Area
NATSEM	National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling
NFPP	Natural Family Planning Program
NLCS	Negotiating the Life Course Survey
NPC	National Perinatal Collection
NSFG	National Survey of Family Growth
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
POA	Post Office Area
RCT	rational choice theory
SEIFA	socio-economic indexes for areas
SLA	Statistical Local Area
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TASA	The Australian Sociological Association
TFR	total fertility rate
TGA	Therapeutic Goods Authority
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UPML	universal paid maternity leave
US or USA	United States of America

Definitions

baby boom	refers to the generation born between 1946 and 1965, known as the Baby Boomers
birth cohort	a group of people born in the same year, or bracket of years
completed fertility rate	the average number of births a cohort of females have borne over their reproductive lifetimes which is usually taken as between 15 and 49 years of age
fecundity	a woman's child-bearing potential
fertility	the ability to conceive for women or impregnate for men, actual birth performance
mean age of maternal first birth	average completed year of age of women when their first child is born
parity	the number of previous pregnancies resulting in live births or stillbirths, excluding the current pregnancy. Zero parity means that the birthing woman has not had a child before this first.
primipara	a woman who is bearing a child for the first time, or has given birth to only one child
primiparous age	a woman's completed age at her first birth
pronatalism	an ideology at a government level promoting increased births
recuperation	births to women who postponed children at earlier ages (under 30)
satisfice	a portmanteau of 'satisfy' and 'suffice'; a decision-making strategy between choosing what is satisfactory and choosing what is best
total fertility rate	the average number of births a woman would have if she were to live through her productive years (ages 15-49) and bear children at each age at the rates observed in a particular year or period
<i>zeitgeist</i>	from the German, meaning the spirit of the age in society, and can be used to describe the intellectual, cultural, ethical and political climate and moral of an era, or a trend, usually as a descriptor for past events

Timing and influences

The time bracket for this investigation is specific: from the release in May 2002 of the Commonwealth of Australia *Intergenerational Report 2002-03*, which most agree was the definitive document that began the national discussion about Australia's ageing population (Brennan 2007; Doughney & King 2006; Heard 2006), to the birth figures for the calendar year 2008, released by the ABS in October 2009, a six-year window through which to view Australia's move into pronatalism. A second timing window was the life of the lump-sum Baby Bonus, from July 2004 to December 2008. The PhD candidature transpired between January 2006 and December 2010 in close time alignment with the life of that lump sum. The research project was conducted from September 2007 to June 2008 prior to changes in the delivery mode of the Baby Bonus, from a lump sum to 13 fortnightly instalments for all recipients, effective January 2009.

The 2006 Census of Population and Housing was conducted during the course of the candidature. A federal election was held in November 2007 with family policies a major part of each Party's platform. The Federal Coalition Government led by John Howard ceded to the Australian Labor Party led by Kevin Rudd.

Commentary on sources

This sociological exploration of the Australian lump-sum Baby Bonus and its roles relies on three domains: demography, social policy and socio-cultural influences. Each component necessitates its own review of the literature, selected inasmuch as it pertains to the ultimate inquiry: young women's values surrounding entry age into first-time motherhood and fertility in pronatalist Australia, and their views about the Baby Bonus. Much of the content of this thesis focusses on events occurring between 2004 and 2008. To help compensate for the time lag between such recent events and scholarly representation in academic journals and books, 'grey literature' has been an important – even vital – component. Indeed, in a sociological study that explores exposure of average Australians – not academics – to messages in the public arena, 'grey' converts conceptually to 'red hot'. Transcripts from radio programs and motion pictures, interviews with political elites, and content of Australian print media are integral to the inquiry. A variety of newspapers are cited to eliminate any possible editorial bias. In this regard, a valuable search tool for media analysis has been the *NewsBank* database, a full-text archive of all print articles for all Australian newspapers and their magazine inserts for the past 10 years. Elsewhere, primary sources from within the academic domain are chosen, particularly in Chapter 3 in the area of demography, and Chapter 6 in the realm of theory. Refereed conference papers, academic journal articles and books, academic

reports posted to university websites, government reports and releases from authoritative bodies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), the Productivity Commission and the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) are also canvassed.

Notes on stylistic choices

- The referencing system of the thesis is author-date and follows the guidelines set out in *Style manual: for authors, editors and printers* 2002, 6th edn., Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. Minimal capitalisation and single quotation marks are two notable features of the author-date system.
- Body text is set in Times New Roman 11pt, 1.5 line spacing. Footnotes and source details are set in Times New Roman 10pt, single line spacing. Headings are set in Arial 12pt, sub-headings in Arial 11pt. Raw data excerpts from qualitative research are italicised and indented. Italicised type in body text is used occasionally for emphasis. If that emphasis is retained from within a quoted source, acknowledgement is expressed as (itals. in original).
- Spelling follows the *Australian concise Oxford dictionary*. Americanised spelling is retained if used in direct quotes, or appears in the name of an organisation.
- In-text references to authors are cited mostly using last name only. When useful, authors are introduced with their full names and domiciles.
- Direct quotes taken from electronic sources without page numbers are referenced with the year of posting to the Internet. The web address appears in the reference list.
- Sources using an Internet reference include the web address.
- ‘Lump-sum Baby Bonus’ and ‘Baby Bonus as a lump sum’ are terms used frequently. Hyphenation is used when ‘lump-sum’ is an adjective, and not when ‘sum’ is a noun.
- Dollar values are Australian currency. International currencies are converted to Australian dollar values using the exchange rate at the time.